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All in a day's work: overcoming telework challenges

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In recent years, more and more businesses are offering their employees the option to telework. According to the American Time Use Survey, which is conducted by the Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 20 percent of wage and salary workers did some or all of their work from home in 2013. Why has the business mindset toward teleworking changed?

For employees, the benefits are obvious—less time spent commuting, less stress, more time with family, heightened job satisfaction, and an overall improved state of mind. Businesses also are now recognizing the benefits to themselves. Companies can recruit from a wider geographic area, thereby drawing on a larger talent pool. Companies can retain workers longer because of greater job satisfaction. In addition, companies can benefit by reducing office space; lowering utility costs; and maintaining continuity during national and natural disasters, other types of organizational threats and emergencies, and possibly during pandemics.

Yet with benefits inevitably come challenges. In their article “[Overcoming telework challenges: outcomes of successful telework strategies](#)” (*The Psychologist-Manager Journal*, May 2014), Tomika W. Greer and Stephanie C. Payne investigate not only the challenges of teleworking but also several strategies of high-performing teleworkers.

To complete their study, Greer and Payne chose 86 high-performing teleworkers (rated by their supervisors at the mean or higher on a standard performance rating scale) and their supervisors employed at a major public accounting firm. To learn what supervisors perceive as the challenges of telework, the authors asked them this: “In what ways does teleworking detract from the effectiveness of your team?” The authors asked the teleworkers to identify any strategies that helped them telework more effectively. The data were used to measure job performance, work–family facilitation, and turnover intentions.

The authors found that the supervisors were concerned about several challenges, including reduced face-to-face communication, ineffective teamwork because of decreased interaction, less managerial control over teleworkers and their performance, nonteleworker jealousies, home distractions, and inadequate technology and file access.

The strategies that the teleworkers listed were even more extensive than the list of challenges, and many of them addressed the challenges that their supervisors pointed out. Some of the more frequently mentioned strategies included having the latest in technologies to ensure ease of access to network servers; ensuring constant accessibility by email, telephone, or other mobile devices; communicating with coworkers and supervisors before and during teleworking as to location, work progress, and updates; keeping a work mindset; preparing a dedicated work area; and setting goals and being extra productive. The teleworkers also mentioned that they should be willing to work at the main worksite when working there would be more helpful for others or because of the nature of the work. Other strategies reported included having a set telework schedule or teleworking on days most convenient for the firm, planning work tasks, communicating with family about needing to work without interruptions, and having outside childcare.

Greer and Payne reported that the high-performing teleworkers used these strategies to minimize or resolve the challenges of teleworking. The teleworkers noted that having the latest technology to access

the worksite network is one of the most important strategies. In addition, the teleworkers found that being accessible to supervisors and coworkers is crucial, because by answering emails and telephones calls immediately, teleworkers are able to show that they are indeed working and are continually connected. Also, by being accessible, teleworkers may alleviate their supervisors' concerns about compromised communication.

The high-performing teleworkers not only found that the strategies helped them overcome challenges of teleworking, but also that these strategies helped enhance the quality of their worklife and family life. The success of the strategies even lowered their intentions to look for another job. With such positive employee results, Greer and Payne point out that other businesses may be able to use these strategies to better equip their employees, teleworkers, and supervisors for a more successful "telework-supportive organizational culture."